

# **THE FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**Thirteenth Report**



**December 1985**

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This Report has been prepared by the staff of the Federal Voting Assistance Program, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Washington D.C.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) administers the Federal responsibilities of the Presidential Designee (Secretary of Defense) under the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955, and the Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act of 1975. These Acts cover all members of the Armed Forces and eligible dependents, Merchant Marine and dependents, and all other U.S. citizens overseas - approximately 6,000,000 potential voters. This report is for the period 1981 through 1984.

- . Of the 6,000,000 potential voters, over 3,000,000 voted or attempted to vote.

- . Voting participation by military personnel increased significantly in 1984 by six percent over 1980 to 55.3% with approximately 47% actually voting. (See page 7)

- . Voting by overseas federal civilian employees increased by two percent to 49.7% and an additional 7.8% tried to vote absentee for a total voting participation rate of 57.5%. (See page 7)

- . Voting by U.S. citizens overseas, not affiliated with the federal government, increased by two percent to 28% and an additional five percent tried to vote absentee for a total voting participation rate of 33%. (See page 7)

- . Problems encountered by each category of voter declined in comparison to 1980 which indicates improvement in the voting program and progress by the states in simplifying the voting process.

- . Local election officials reported that greater numbers of individuals cast absentee ballots in 1984 as compared to the two previous presidential election years (1976 and 1980). The median absentee percentage was 6.7%, and the mean was 6.5% as compared to the 1980 results where the median and mean were 4.7% and 5.2% respectively.

- . Satisfaction with the voting assistance obtained was generally high and especially high among absentee voters.

- . The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form continues to be the primary source used to register and request a ballot. Nearly all absentee ballot applicants covered by the Acts used the FPCA to request a ballot for the 1984 election.

- . One-half of the election officials reported using the return post card portion of the FPCA to acknowledge receipt of the ballot request; of those who did not, just over half acknowledged receipt by some other means. Thus, approximately three quarters of all applicants received some form of acknowledgement from a local election official.

. The percentage of jurisdictions in which ballots were first mailed in the third week of October declined to 18% as opposed to 25% in 1980 and for the month as a whole, the percentage fell from 83.3% to approximately 70%. This reflects an improvement in this process in that absentee ballots are being mailed earlier by more jurisdictions.

#### Progress of States in Implementing the Acts

The decline in voting problems by citizens covered by the Acts can be directly attributed to states which have simplified the absentee voting process and mailed absentee ballots earlier to the voters. State legislative initiatives undertaken by the FVAP have resulted in the following improvements:

. All but two states accept the FPCA as a simultaneous request for registration and a ballot. (See page 4)

. Twenty-two states now provide forty or more days transit time, for absentee ballots to military and citizens overseas. Seven states changed to the forty-plus day transit time in their 1985 legislative sessions while several other states are still actively considering such legislation. (See page 3)

. Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia have removed the notary requirement for all military personnel and citizens overseas. Two other states have removed the requirement for citizens located outside the U.S. only. Most other states have removed some of the notary requirements; five states have removed the notary requirement for ballot requests and ballot return envelopes. Only four states still require registration forms, ballot requests, and ballot return envelopes be notarized. (See page 4)

. Twenty-two states have enacted legislation which accepts one FPCA request for all elections during a calendar or election year. (See page 3)

. Twenty-six states have eliminated "not earlier than" dates for the acceptance of registration and/or ballot requests. This relieves the burden of absentee voters submitting applications during specified periods. Many other states limit the adverse impact of "not earlier than" dates by administrative actions. (See page 4)

. Six states have enacted a special write-in absentee ballot for those persons on maneuvers or located in remote areas where regular mail service is unavailable. (See page 5)

#### Information Support

A coordinated worldwide campaign was conducted to inform individuals about their right to vote, how to vote, and the importance of their vote. The public service campaign was conducted in coordination with the National Association of Secretaries of State and the Advertising Council. Over \$26 million in time and space was contributed by U.S. media in support of this

effort. Armed Forces Radio and Television, Stars and Stripes and other internal Defense media as well as English language overseas media participated in this campaign.

### Problem Areas

#### Ballot Transit Time:

A serious problem still exists in ensuring timely delivery of absentee ballots to all who request them. Almost one-fifth of all ballots were mailed to applicants in the last two weeks of October. Although this represents some improvement over 1980, when approximately one-quarter of all ballots were mailed after mid-October, this is the major contributory factor to disenfranchising military and overseas voters.

#### Communications:

A large number of potential voters cited as their primary reason for not voting that they "didn't know how to get a ballot" - 15.4% military, 10.6% Federally employed civilians and 29% other U.S. citizens. An additional 16% of other citizens overseas said they didn't vote because they "didn't think they were eligible to vote."

#### Procedures:

A large number of voters requested a primary ballot and failed to make a separate request for the general election ballot as required by most state laws. This disenfranchised many absentee voters.

#### Incomplete Applications:

Seventy-eight percent of the election officials indicated that the lack of an adequate home address on the FPCA was the most frequent problem in processing applications for registration and/or absentee ballots.

## INTRODUCTION

This is the thirteenth report since the enactment of the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955 and covers 1981 through 1984.

The current program is based on the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955 (FVAA) and the Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act of 1975 (OCVRA). The two Acts authorize the President to designate the head of a federal department or agency to administer the federal voting assistance responsibilities. The Secretary of Defense is the responsible designee for administering these Acts and the Director of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) carries out the functions of the program.

Both Acts require the states to allow certain citizens to register and vote in federal elections using absentee procedures. These citizens include members of the Armed Forces and the Merchant Marine, their spouses and dependents; the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other U.S. citizens residing outside of the United States - a total of approximately 6,000,000 eligible voters. In addition to the federal laws governing absentee registration and voting, most states permit these citizens to register for and vote absentee in state and local elections.

Executive Branch departments and agencies with employees overseas conduct individual voting assistance programs and utilize the informational materials available from the Federal Voting Assistance Program. The Department of State, through its embassies and consulates, provides absentee voting information and assistance to U.S. citizens overseas. In addition, the State Department makes the diplomatic pouch available to voters for the transmission of election materials back to the U.S.

The U.S. Postal Service and the Military Postal Service facilitate the transmission of election materials between the voter and election jurisdiction.

The General Services Administration prints the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and makes distribution upon request from federal departments and agencies.

The Attorney General is authorized to enforce the provisions of these Acts.

## FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (FVAP)

The Federal Voting Assistance Program office maintains continuous contact with state and local election officials, assists states and other U.S. jurisdictions in adopting the mandatory and recommendatory provisions of the FVAA and the OCVRA, and advises them on the applicability of Federal

laws and regulations to their individual electoral systems. An ombudsman service for all persons covered by the Acts and for local election officials is also provided to assist personnel in voting either in person or by absentee. The right of all U.S. citizens to register and vote is publicized to a worldwide audience on a continuous basis.

#### PROGRESS OF STATES IN IMPLEMENTING THE FVAA AND OCVRA

The four years since the Twelfth Report of December 1981 have seen significant improvement in the absentee voting procedures applicable to persons covered by the FVAA and OCVRA. The Federal Voting Assistance Program's pursuit of state legislative initiatives has made the states aware of the persisting difficulties experienced by voters covered by the Acts, which in turn has led to serious efforts by most states to address these problems. However, the process is far from complete, and the voters served by the FVAA and OCVRA continue to encounter barriers to voting.

While much progress has been made over the past four years and the Federal Voting Assistance Program expects that progress to continue, there are certain aspects of the legislative efforts which make it difficult to achieve the objective of a uniform simple absentee procedure for citizens covered by the Acts which does not disenfranchise them.

There are interstate and intrastate differences in voting procedures which cause administrative difficulties for the FVAP, and are a source of great confusion to voting assistance officers and counselors and local election officials. The lack of uniformity in procedures from state to state hinders voting assistance officers and counselors. Familiarity with the procedures of one state provides no basis of knowledge for assisting voters from another state and may actually mislead a person in dealing with another state's procedures. In addition, the lack of uniformity within a state only exacerbates the confusion by factoring in local election officials, who may not know that different procedures apply and therefore give conflicting advice or require more stringent procedures than are necessary. In addition, voting and registration procedures may vary within the same family, i.e. military and dependents.

A second problem is a function of the dynamics of the political process in the states. While the FVAP pursues positive initiatives to improve and simplify absentee voting procedures, steps must be taken to ensure that those gains which are made, or other existing beneficial provisions, are not adversely changed because even the most progressive states may consider legislation which impacts adversely on absentee voting rights. It is necessary to continually monitor legislation in every state. Shifting political climates mean that improvements in absentee voting procedures cannot be viewed as entirely secure. For example, legislation was introduced in one 1985 state legislature which would have repealed point by point improvements which were only made in the 1984 session. Similarly, the 1985 legislative season saw numerous states considering September primaries, a change which could affect adequate ballot transit time.

The nature of the obstacles makes broad generalizations about state absentee registration and voting procedures difficult and somewhat



misleading. The FVAP has undertaken several legislative initiatives which are being pursued with each state as appropriate. The purpose of this part of the program is to simplify the absentee process, move toward some degree of uniformity in the treatment of FVAA and OCVRA absentee voters, and remove obstacles to voting by these citizens.

The two main problems are lack of adequate transit time and the use of a single FPCA to request ballots for all elections in a calendar year. Other major problems are the elimination of the notary requirement of some states and "not earlier than" application request limitations.

The specific initiatives and progress are as follows:

I Provide Forty-Five Days Transit Time For Absentee Ballots To Military And Overseas Citizens.

Twenty-two states now provide forty or more days transit time, either statutorily or through administrative practice:

Florida	Maryland	New Mexico	South Dakota
Idaho	Michigan	New York	Texas
Illinois	Mississippi	North Carolina	Virginia
Indiana	Missouri	North Dakota	West Virginia
Iowa	Montana	Ohio	
Kansas	New Jersey	South Carolina	

Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, Washington and Wyoming all provide at least 35 days ballot transit time. In 1985, Alabama, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon and Pennsylvania considered, but did not pass, legislation providing for 45-day ballot transit time. The 1985 legislative sessions saw seven states change to the forty-plus days transit time while seven other states are still considering such legislation.

II Consider A Single FPCA Request For Ballot To Be Automatically Accepted As A Request For Ballots For All Elections Held During The Calendar Year.

This initiative is particularly important because despite constant instructions to the contrary, many voters mistakenly believe that if they apply for and receive a primary ballot they will automatically receive a ballot for the general election. Twenty-two states now have enacted this legislation:

Alaska	Kansas	North Carolina	Utah
Arizona	Maine	Oklahoma	Washington
Arkansas	Maryland	Oregon	West Virginia
Florida	Michigan	South Carolina	Wyoming
Georgia	Minnesota	Tennessee	
Hawaii	Montana	Texas	

Alabama, Indiana, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin are considering this provision.

III Accept The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) As A Combination Registration And A Request For Absentee Ballots.

Forty-eight states send a ballot in response to a single FPCA. Fifteen do so by waiving registration altogether. Twenty-five states accept the FPCA as a registration form, either for temporary or permanent registration. Eight more states send state registration forms along with the ballot, four states requiring return by the registration deadline and four permitting return of the materials by the ballot return deadline. Only Alaska and West Virginia still require two FPCA's to register and request an absentee ballot. Overall progress has been good, but the need for more uniformity is apparent.

IV Remove The Notary Requirement On Any Election Materials; Replace With Self Administered Oath, If Necessary.

Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia have removed the notary requirement for all military personnel and U.S. citizens outside the U.S.:

Alaska	Kentucky	New York	Utah
Arizona	Maine	North Dakota	Vermont
California	Maryland	Ohio	Virginia
Georgia	Minnesota	Oregon	Washington
Idaho	Missouri	Pennsylvania	Wyoming
Indiana	Montana	South Carolina	
Iowa	Nebraska	Tennessee	
Kansas	New Jersey	Texas	

Most other states have removed some of the notary requirements. Only Delaware and Mississippi still require that registration forms, ballot requests and ballot return envelopes be notarized.

V Eliminate Any "Not Earlier Than" Acceptance Dates For Registration Or Absentee Ballot Requests.

"Not earlier than" filing dates can be particularly burdensome to military and overseas voters because of the nature of motivational campaigns. These campaigns frequently occur well in advance of the election and have the intended effect of encouraging absentee voters to apply early for ballots. It is doubly frustrating to these voters to be disqualified for applying too early. An additional problem is that a state's absentee voting procedure may change if the "not earlier than" deadline is not complied with. Some states which accept a single FPCA as both a registration form and request for absentee ballot do so only if the FPCA is received within the prescribed time frame, and require a second FPCA to request a ballot if the deadline is not met. Twenty-six states and the District of Columbia have eliminated "not earlier than" dates for FVAA and OCVRA voters:

California	Massachusetts	New York	Texas
Connecticut	Minnesota	North Carolina	Utah
Florida	Mississippi	Oklahoma	Vermont
Iowa	Nevada	Pennsylvania	Virginia
Kentucky	New Hampshire	Rhode Island	Wisconsin
Maine	New Jersey	South Carolina	
Maryland	New Mexico	South Dakota	

Ohio is considering this change. It should be noted that many states limit the adverse impact of "not earlier than" dates by administrative procedures. They simply hold early applications until they can legally process them. This procedure is sporadic, and is not as effective as eliminating the requirement.

VI Provide For Special Absentee Ballot Which Would Be Available 90 Days Before An Election Which Could Be Used By Persons In Extremely Remote Areas, Such As Submariners, Peace Corps Volunteers, And Missionaries, Where Regular Mail Service Cannot Provide A Minimum 45 Day Transit Time For Absentee Ballots.

The special blank absentee ballot is designed to meet the needs of those military personnel and other persons overseas whose military contingencies or other special circumstances require them to be out of communication for an extended period of time. These individuals cannot receive and return the normal absentee ballots within the regular mailing time. For example, military personnel deployed on submarines may not receive any mail for a month at a time. Peace Corps volunteers or missionaries may be similarly situated. With the special ballot these voters can request a blank ballot 90 days in advance and write in the names of candidates or party preferences.

California, Connecticut, Georgia, Maine, Oregon and Washington have enacted this form. Ohio and Pennsylvania are considering it.

VII Adopt The Provisions Of The Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act Into State Law.

The following states have enacted OCVRA provisions into state law as opposed to administrative regulations:

Alaska	Idaho	Nevada	Rhode Island
Arizona	Illinois	New Hampshire	South Carolina
California	Indiana	New Jersey	South Dakota
Colorado	Iowa	New Mexico	Utah
Connecticut	Louisiana	New York	Virginia
Florida	Minnesota	North Dakota	Wisconsin
Georgia	Missouri	Ohio	Wyoming

This legislative assessment does not include information on which states introduced specific reforms which were not enacted. Several states contemplate omnibus election bills or recodifications in their 1986 sessions and will consider this legislation at that time.

## PROGRAM RESULTS

Analysis of the 1984 Post Election Survey indicates there was a significant increase in voting participation by citizens covered by the Acts.

### Post Election Surveys

The 1984 Post-Election Voting Surveys were conducted to: (1) determine participation in the electoral process by citizens covered by the Acts, (2) evaluate the impact of efforts designed to simplify and ease the process of voting absentee, (3) measure other progress made to facilitate absentee participation, and (4) identify any remaining barriers to voting by these citizens.

In order to provide a comprehensive assessment of the success of the Federal Voting Assistance Program and the problems which remain with absentee voting, four separate surveys were conducted to obtain information on (1) members of the military and their dependents in the U.S. and overseas, federally employed civilians and their dependents overseas, (2) other U.S. citizens overseas not affiliated with the federal government, (3) unit voting assistance officers and embassy and consulate personnel charged with the responsibility for providing information on absentee voting, and (4) local election officials who must process applications and forward registration materials and ballots.

Citizens in categories (1) and (2) were asked to indicate what they had done (if anything) in regard to voting, to evaluate sources of information used; and if applicable, to give their reasons for not voting.

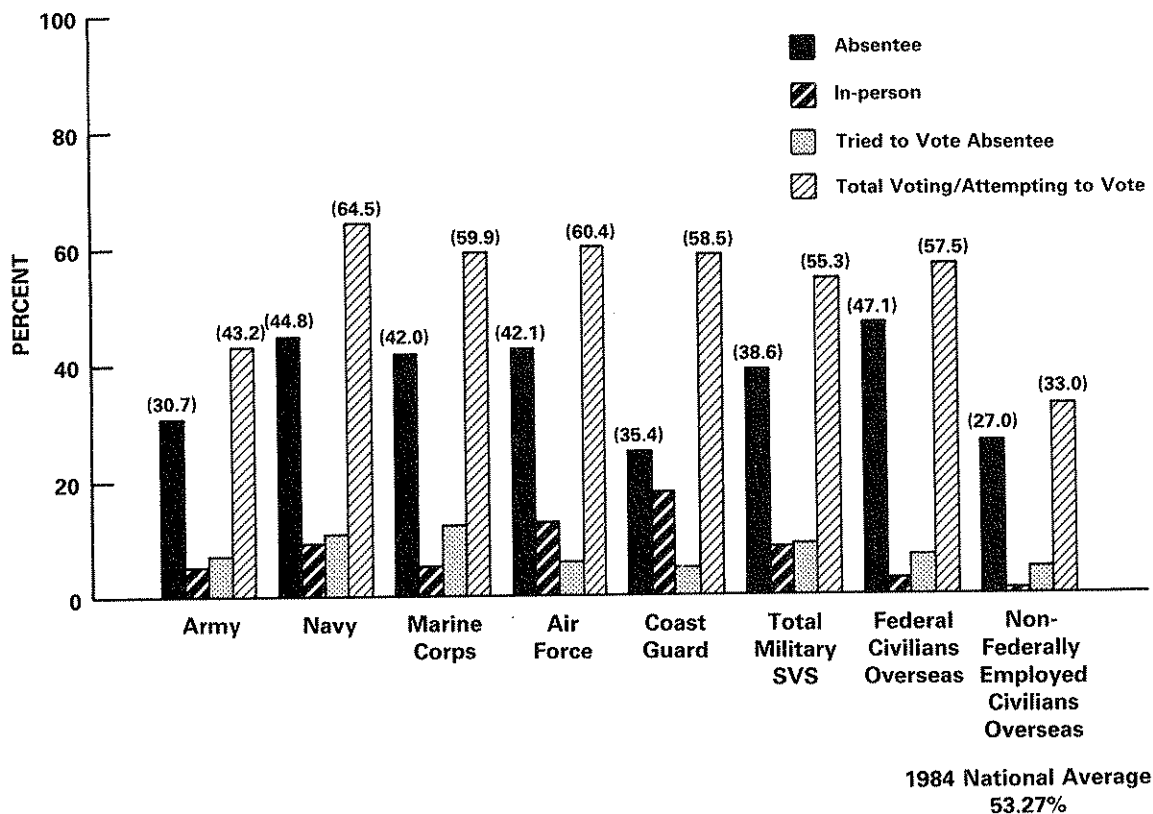
Unit Voting Officers are the primary source of voting assistance for members of the military and their dependents, and these persons were surveyed to determine the scope of their efforts, the type of assistance provided, and difficulties encountered.

The survey of local election officials asked for statistics on voting in general, absentee voting in particular, and problems experienced in handling requests and ballots from citizens covered by the Acts.

The survey of embassy/consulate voting officers was conducted to determine the overall voting assistance provided and the difficulties encountered in assisting U.S. citizens abroad.

The Voting Participation Chart (1) provides a breakdown of voting behavior by the various groups surveyed. At a time when voting participation by the general population did not increase appreciably, military participation in the 1984 elections increased substantially by 6.1 percent. This increase was primarily in absentee voting by these citizens. The major reason for this significant increase can be attributed directly to the command support and emphasis on the voting program by each Service and the improvements by the states in the absentee voting process. (See section on Progress of States)

**CHART 1**  
**VOTING PARTICIPATION 1984**



**VOTING PARTICIPATION 1980**

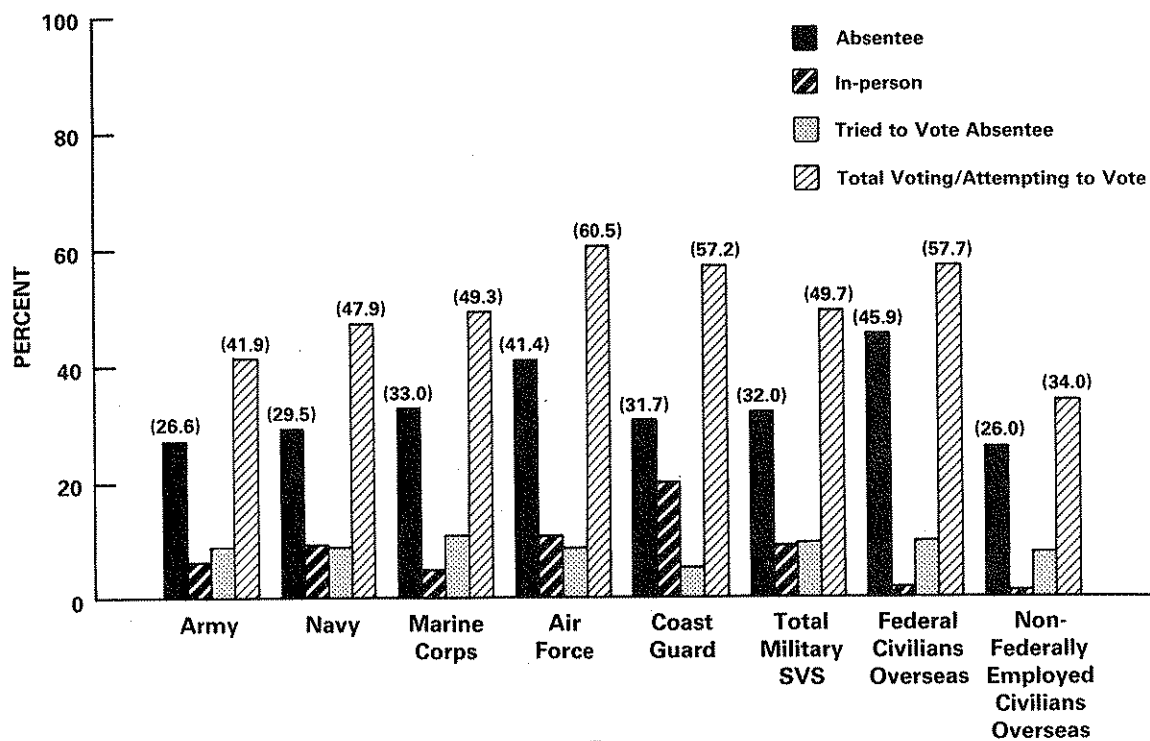


Chart (1) reflects a two percent increase in voting between 1980 and 1984 among federal civilian employees working overseas. It also reflects a two percent decrease in voters who attempted to vote but were unsuccessful, indicating improvement in the absentee voting process.

Overall, 38.6% military personnel and 47.1% federal civilian employees reported that they voted absentee.

Among the military absentee voters, 47.4% had one or more dependents eligible to vote and among the federally employed civilian absentee voters 73.4% had one or more eligible dependents. Seventy-two percent of the military dependents cast ballots and 75% of the dependents of federally employed civilians cast ballots.

Voting by other U.S. citizens overseas not affiliated with the federal government increased by two percent to 28% (27% absentee and 1% in person). An additional 5% applied for an absentee ballot but did not receive it in time to vote. This is down 3% from 1980 and shows an improvement in this area as well.

Based on statistics from the Federal Election Commission, 53.27% of the U.S. civilian voting age population reported voting in the 1984 general election, representing a minor increase over 1980.

Compared to 1980, the 1984 population is somewhat older. (The trend is less apparent among the civilian employees.) Voting studies have consistently shown that voter turnout is related to age -- up to approximately retirement age, older persons are more likely than younger persons to vote.

**CHART 2**  
**MILITARY VOTING BY AGE**

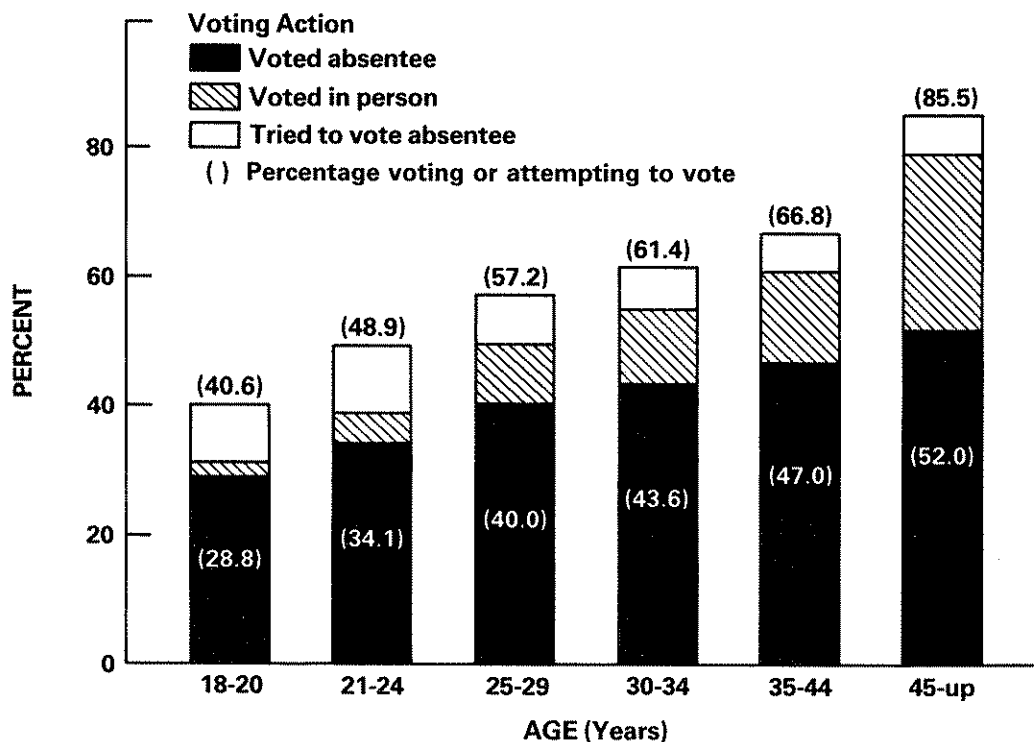
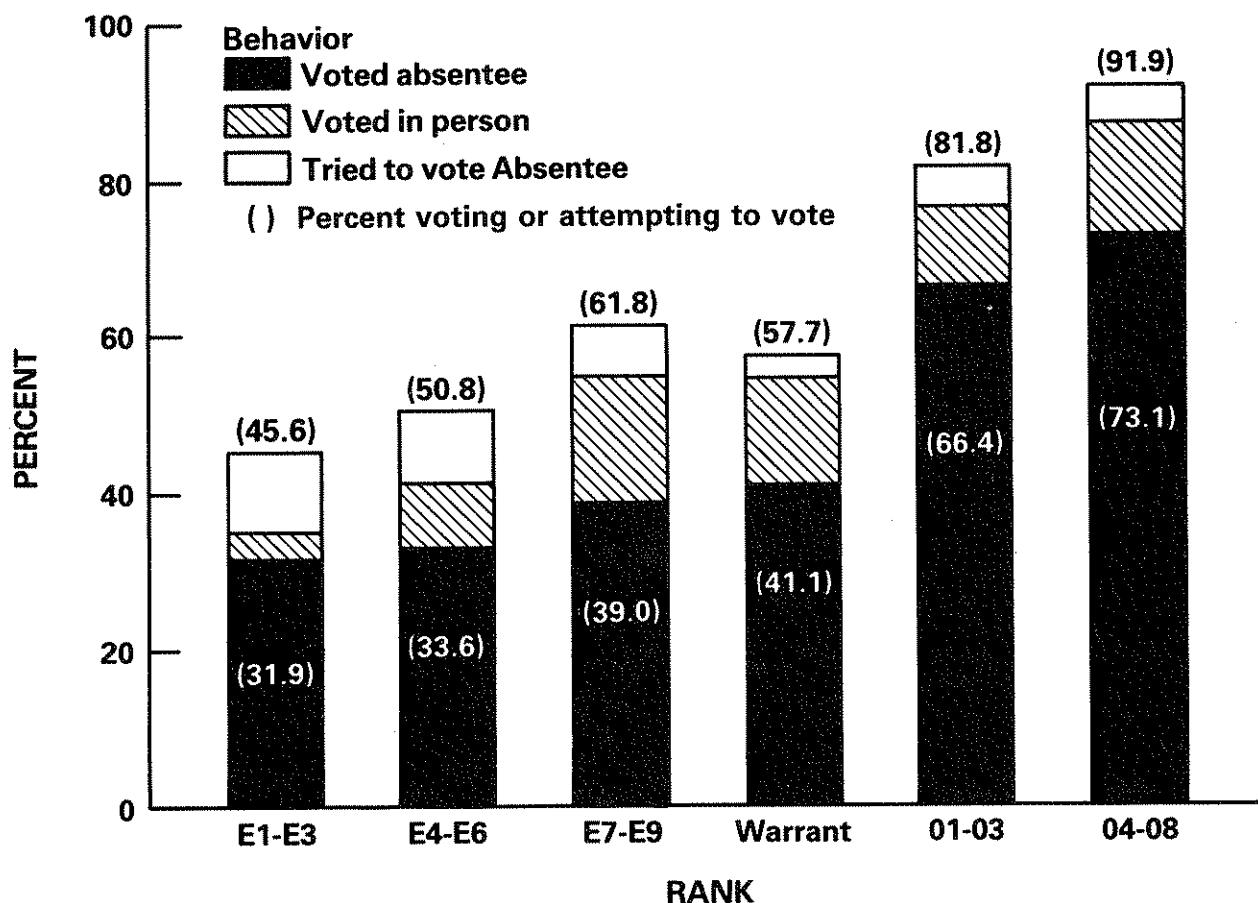


Chart (2) shows the strong association between age and voting. At each age range the proportion voting absentee, voting in person, and total voting increases progressively from 31.3% of the 18-20 year olds voting to 79.4% of those 45 and older. In addition, there is a larger number of unsuccessful voters under 25 years old, compared to those 25 and over. The lesser tendency for younger persons to vote is probably contributing to the relatively lower level of participation by Army personnel as compared to the Air Force and Coast Guard. It does not, however, explain the relatively high rate of voting in the Navy, which exhibits a higher tendency to vote than would be expected from the age distribution of Navy personnel. The increase in voting by Navy personnel which runs counter to the age tendency was caused by the very effective and aggressive command emphasis on voting participation.

**CHART 3**  
**VOTING BEHAVIOR BY RANK**



Officers in the military are older, on the average, than enlisted personnel. The median age for officers is 32.7; the median among the enlisted rank is 24.4. Rank thus becomes significant in accounting for differences in voting across the Services (notably, the Air Force and Coast Guard have a greater proportionate number of officers - see Chart 3).

Another factor associated with voting is geographic mobility. Persons residing in the same location for a longer period of time are more likely to vote in an election than those who have been at their current location for a shorter period. Time at duty station is another variable which affects voting. The large majority, between 79.1% and 93.8%, of each military sample had been at their duty station more than four months. Approximately 95% of federal civilian employee respondents had not relocated during the four months prior to the 1984 election.

Not quite one-third (31.6%) of the military sample were overseas at the time of the survey/election; the balance were located inside the U.S. or in U.S. territories. Nearly all of the federal civilian employee sample, 96.7%, were working outside the U.S. and U.S. territories at the time of the survey and election.

The surveys prove the relationship between age, rank, time at duty station, and location of duty station on the one hand, and voting (either absentee or in-person) in the 1984 election. The surveys also prove that an effective voter information and education program with proper command support can overcome normal tendencies of the U.S. electorate.

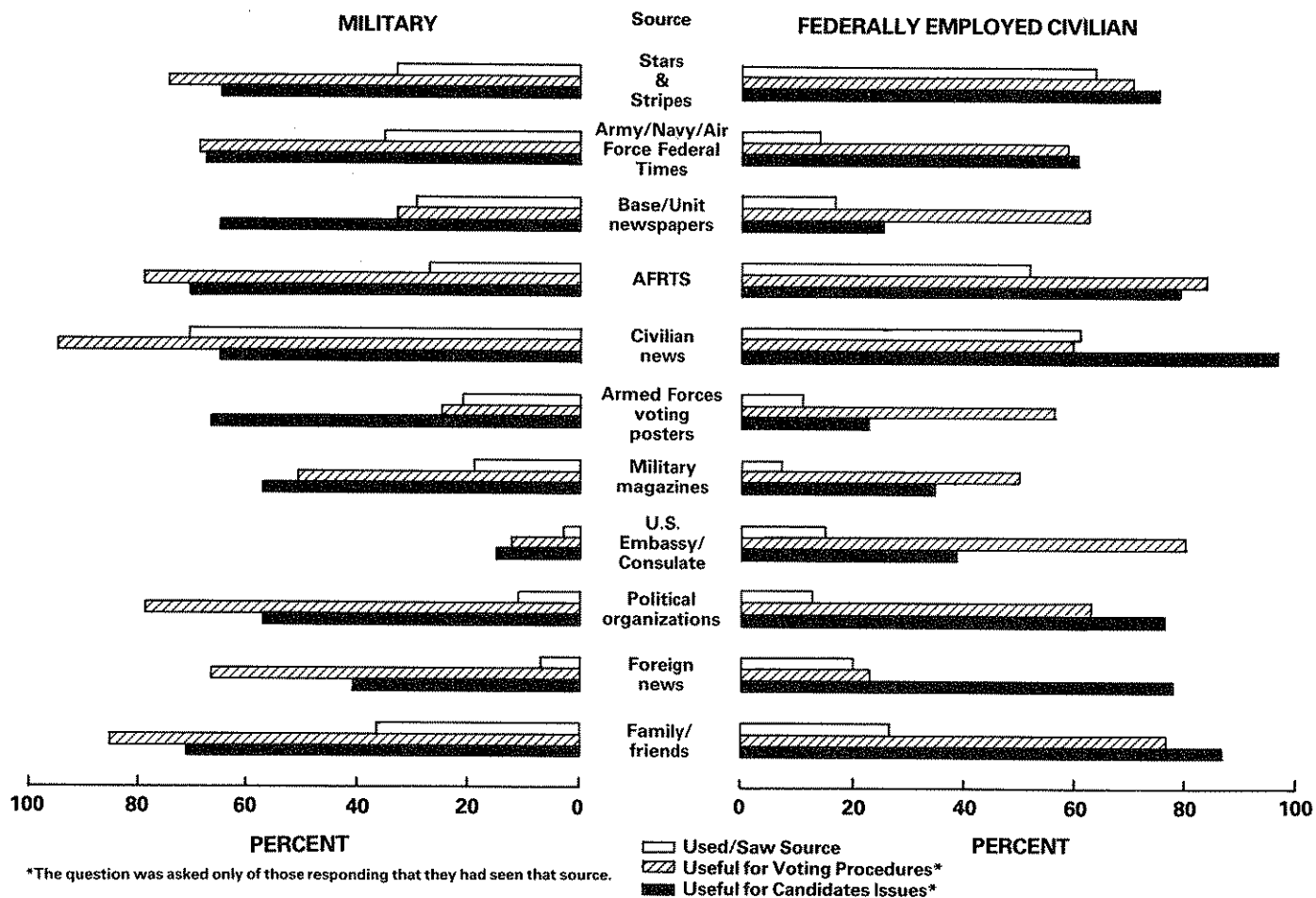
The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) was the primary tool used by Service members, 94.2% used the FPCA and 86.1% obtained the FPCA through military channels. Among the civilian employees, 86.5% reported using the FPCA. About half of them (43.9%) also received the FPCA form through the military -- the most popular means of obtaining it.

#### Sources of Voting Assistance

Voters were asked about sources of information used which assisted their participation in the electoral process and about their overall satisfaction with the assistance received. The majority of military indicated the unit voting officer as the major source of assistance. Compared to 1980, the proportion of absentee voters in the military needing voting assistance declined by five percentage points -- from 50% to 45%. Satisfaction with the voting assistance obtained was generally high and especially high among successful absentee voters, as only 16.7% of the military electors and 18.7% of the federally employed civilians indicated any dissatisfaction at all with the assistance they received. Among absentee voters in the military, 41.7% used the Voting Assistance Guide -- a percentage very similar to the 42.1% of the civilian employees who used it. These numbers are higher than in 1980, when only 33% of the military and 22% of their civilian counterparts reported using the Guide.

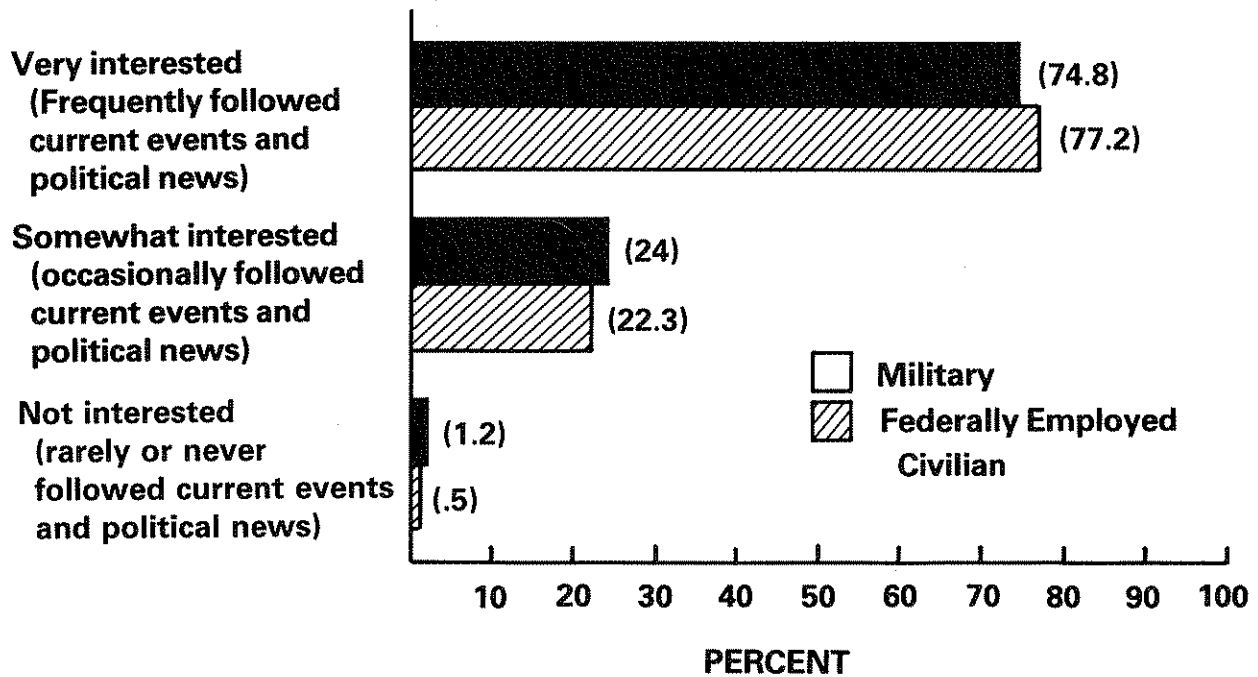


**CHART 4**  
**SOURCES OF ELECTION/VOTING INFORMATION**  
**(Absentee Voters)**



Over 70% of military voters indicated that the most common voter information source they used was civilian newspapers, magazines, radio or TV. For federally employed civilian voters overseas, Stars and Stripes was the source relied upon most (64.4%) with civilian news sources from the U.S. ranking second (61.6%).

# **CHART 5** **INTEREST IN 1984 ELECTION** **(Absentee Voters)**

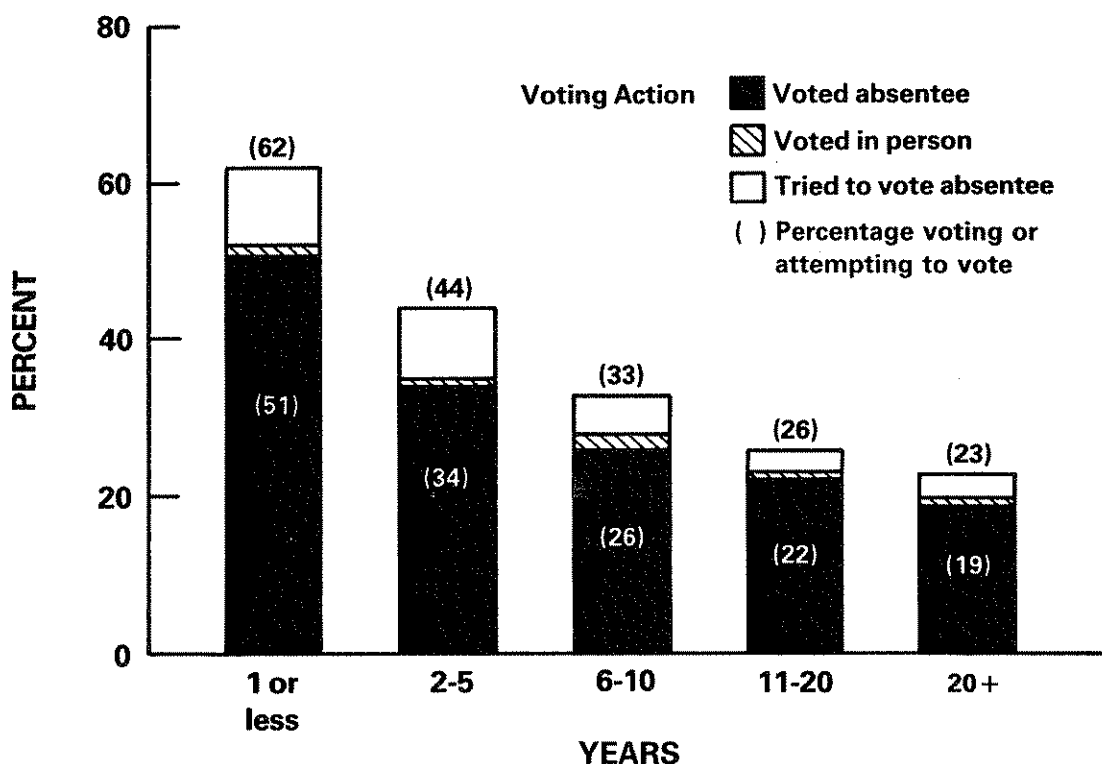


Seventy-five percent of the military voters and 77% of the Federal civilian employee voters said they were very interested in the election and frequently followed current events and political news. In 1980, the percentages were 80 and 87 respectively. Nearly all the remainder indicated that they were somewhat interested and occasionally followed current events and political news.

Other U.S. Citizens Not Affiliated with the Federal Government  
Living Outside the Country

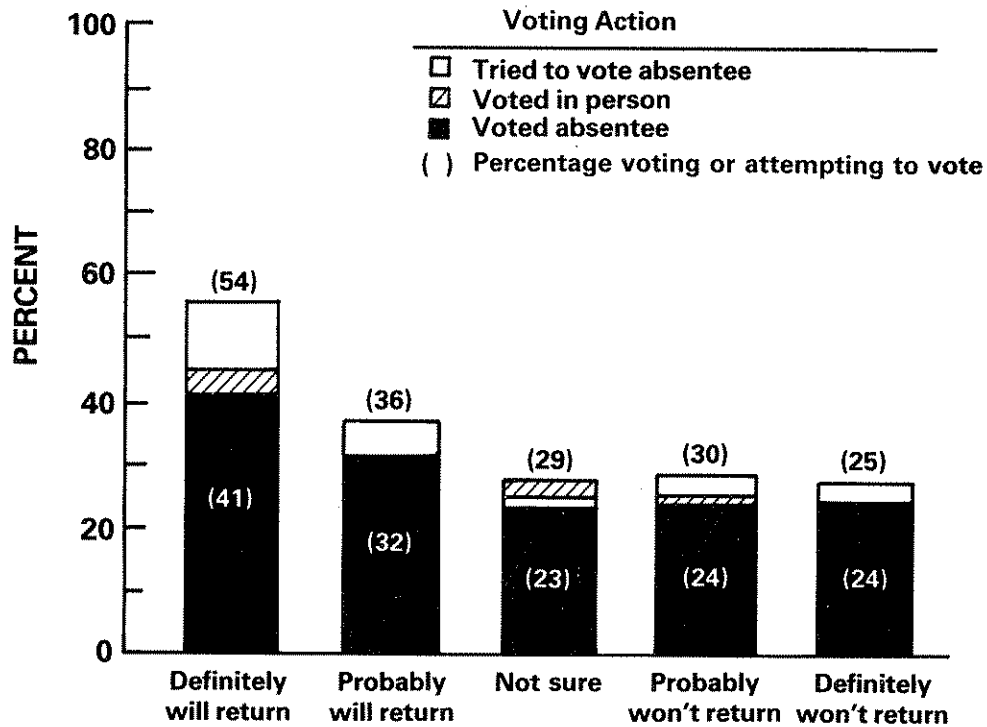
The voting rate among other U.S. citizens overseas was considerably lower than among either military personnel or federally employed civilians (Chart 1). The significant difference may reflect the impact of the counsel of unit voting officers, available to military personnel and overseas federal employees. Also, the military sample's voting participation included a portion of voters stationed in the U.S. In addition, one should take into account the length of time a citizen resides overseas. For example, various studies have indicated that voting was much higher among citizens who had lived abroad for a relatively short period and among those planning to return to the U.S. sometime in the future.

**CHART 6**  
**NON-FEDERALLY EMPLOYED U.S. CITIZENS OVERSEAS**  
**Voting Action by Years Away from U.S.**



People who had been abroad for one year or less had the highest rate of voting (52%, 51% absentee - 1% in person), and the rate declined steadily as the period of absence increased. Only about 20% of all citizens abroad for more than 20 years reported casting an absentee ballot or voting in person.

# **CHART 7** **NON-FEDERALLY EMPLOYED U.S. CITIZEN OVERSEAS** **Voting action by Probability of Return to the U.S.**

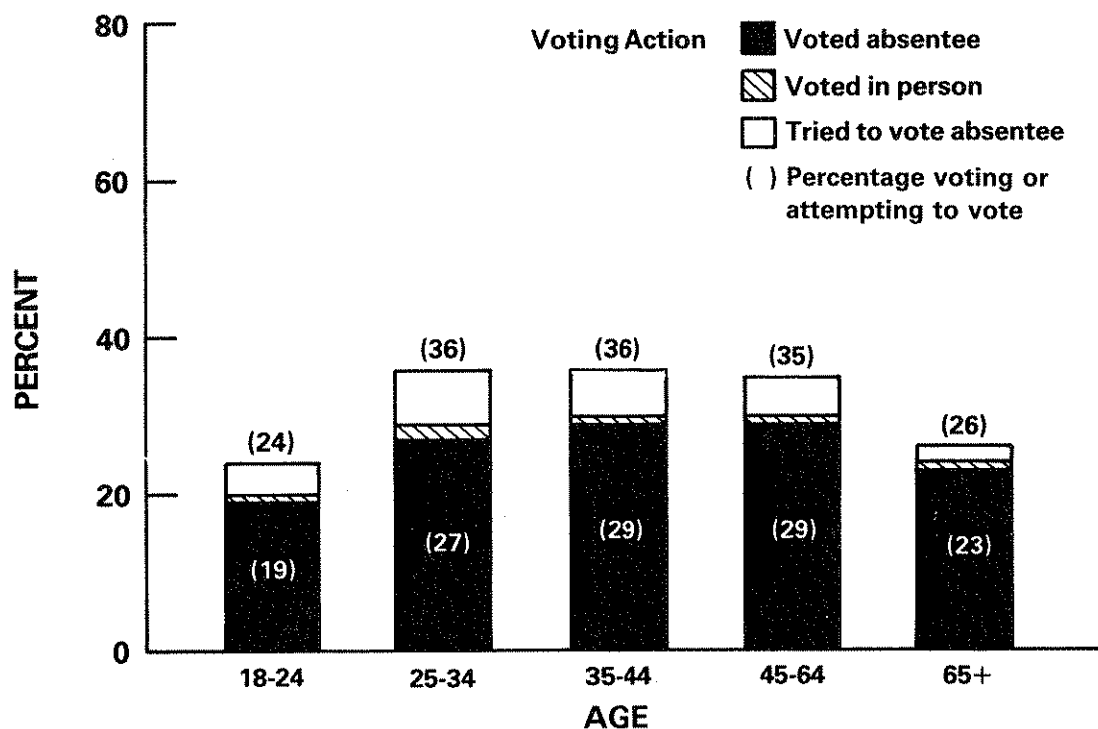


The 1984 data also confirms that the probability of returning to the U.S. decreases with the number of years away and, in turn, that people are less likely to vote if they do not expect to return or are unsure about returning.

# CHART 8

## NON-FEDERALLY EMPLOYED U.S. CITIZENS OVERSEAS

### Voting Action by Age Group



Although overall voting participation was fairly constant comparing 1980-1984, there were significant changes within age groups. For example, among voters between the ages of 18 and 24, voting declined by more than 50% from 1980 to 1984, and within the 25-34 bracket, the rate dropped as well. Voting turnout increased among the older age groups, though by smaller margins. The 1980 study reflected voting increases within all but the 65 and older age bracket.

# **CHART 9** **NON-FEDERALLY EMPLOYED U.S. CITIZEN OVERSEAS** **Action by Employment Category**

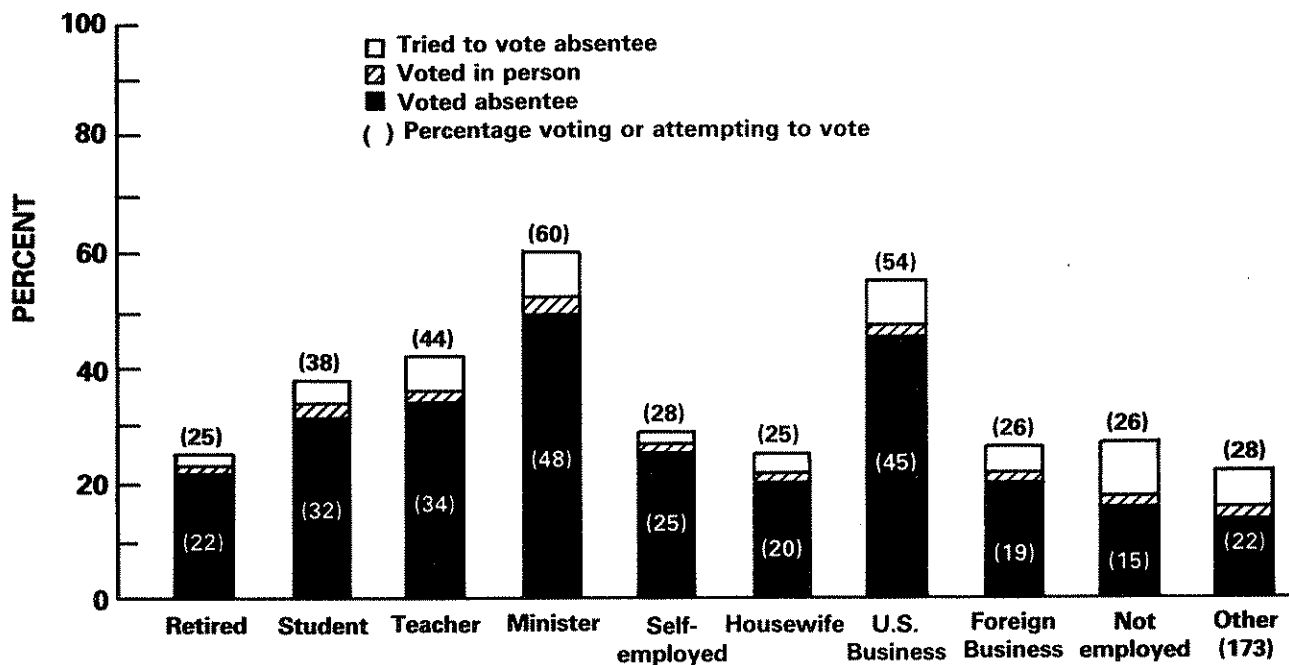
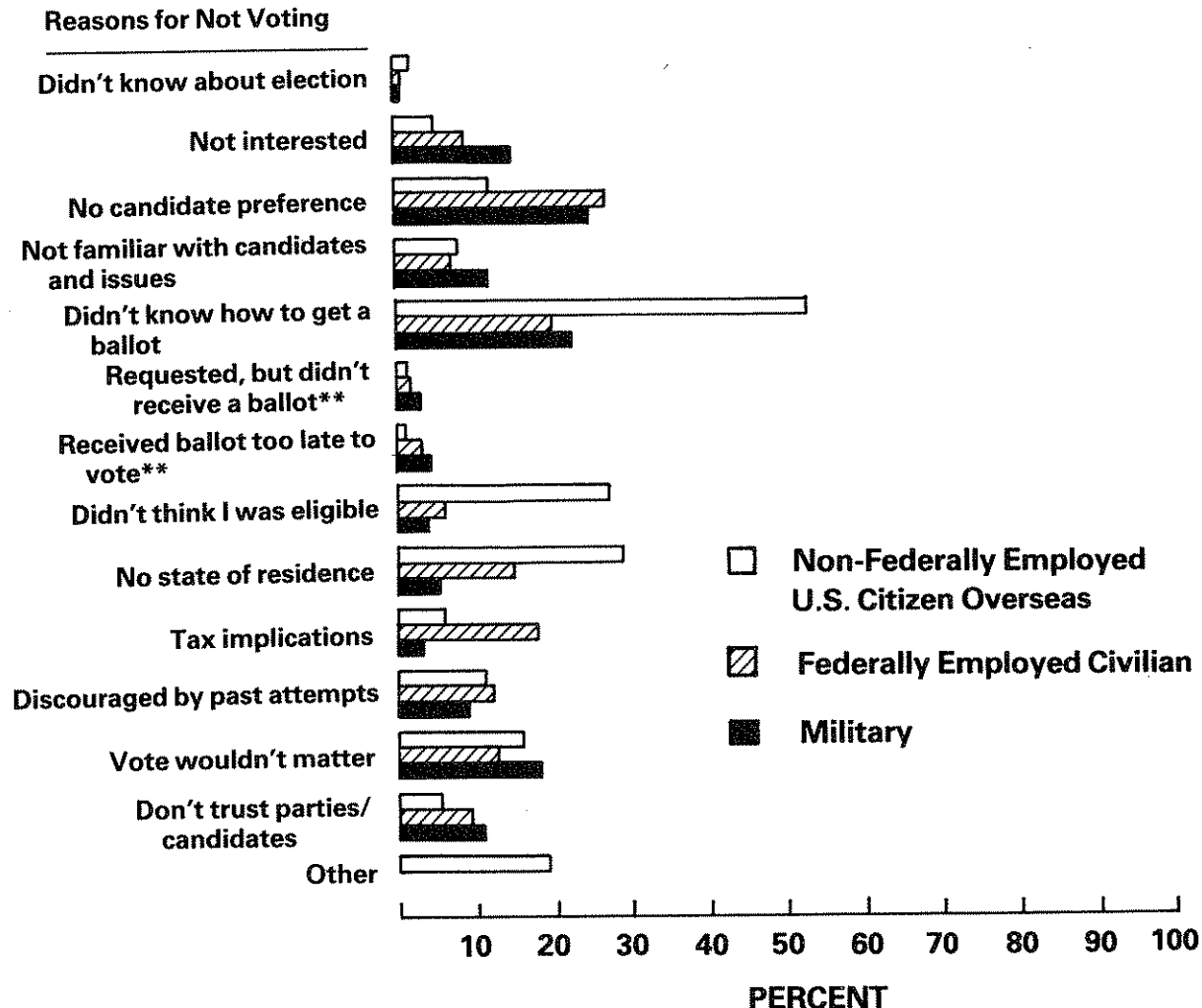


Chart 9 reflects that voting was the highest among ministers with 51%; followed by 47% of persons employed with U.S. corporations overseas; 35% teachers and 34% students. The 1980 figures were similar. The lowest voting rate was among the unemployed.

Of the OCVRA voters, approximately 35% of the unsuccessful applicants applied for their ballot in October or November, in comparison to 21% of the successful absentee voters that waited that long. Delayed application does account for some "unsuccessful applications" but is not the primary cause. Insufficient ballot transit time continues to be the primary obstacle for these voters although improvements have been made. On the average those who cast an absentee ballot waited about 45 days to receive their ballot which was the same in 1980, while the unsuccessful applicants had to wait 49 days compared to 60 days in 1980.

Where a notarized oath is required, it may also have impeded the absentee voting process, but less than half of these voters were registered in a state requiring such an oath.

# **CHART 10** **PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS CITING EACH REASON** **FOR NOT VOTING** **(Non Voter Non-Applicants)**



\*Figures presented represent the percentages of respondents indicating that each reason applied to them.

\*\*These individuals indicated earlier that they had not, in fact, applied for a ballot.

Chart 10 reflects that approximately 25% of the non-voting military and 27% of federally employed civilians cited "no candidate preference" as the reason for not voting. The next most common answer was "didn't know how to get a ballot" with 23% military and 20% civilians.

However, 53% of the non-federally employed non-voters cited "didn't know how to get a ballot" as their reason for not voting. Two other reasons are mentioned by 20% or more: "No state of residence," "Didn't think I was eligible." This indicates there is a need to improve the information, education and communication aspects of the program - particularly as it pertains to other U.S. citizens not affiliated with the federal government.

Ninety-five percent of unsuccessful applicants used the FPCA form to request a ballot. Thus, the method of application can be ruled out as a reason for not receiving the ballot or receiving it too late to vote. One explanation for not being able to vote may be attributed to the time the ballot application was submitted. In other words, most unsuccessful applicants may have sent in their applications later than successful absentee voters. Another possibility is that the voter applied too early. However, there were a number of absentee voters who assumed that only one request was needed to receive all the ballots during a calendar year. In some states this is true but the majority of the states require a separate application for each election.

## VOTING ASSISTANCE OFFICERS

### Military

A voting assistance officer is appointed at every level of command within the military and one is appointed at every embassy and consulate. The voting assistance officer is responsible for providing accurate procedural information and assistance to individuals desiring to register and vote. The voting assistance officer plays a key role in enabling full exercise of the voting franchise among the citizens covered by the Acts.

Over two-thirds of the military unit voting assistance officers are junior grade officers (pay grade 01-03), and enlisted personnel accounted for another 21%. Eighty-seven percent had served as voting assistance officers for over three months prior to the election; 60% had served more than six months; and 20% for over one year. The tenure of unit voting officers increased slightly over 1980. There was an increase in the use of non-commissioned officers, primarily by the Navy, as voting assistant counselors.

Fifty-eight percent had received some type of formal training related to the role of voting assistance officer; however, the percentage receiving training varied considerably by Service; ranging from 68% in the Air Force to only 36% in the Coast Guard.

The most comprehensive source available to voting assistance officers is the Voting Assistance Guide. Over 90% of the voting assistance officers received the Guide with approximately 67% obtaining a copy during the first six months of the election year. Thus, the Guide was available to most officers in time for the heaviest period of absentee ballot requests for the general election. There was wide variation in the number of people that voting officers reported assisting with the median number being 74. The information or assistance requested most often included providing an FPCA (68%). Forty-two percent of voting officers complained that long delays in receiving a response to FPCA's was a problem along with 33% stating that lack of response to FPCA's was a problem; 30% had difficulty determining whether FPCA's were received; 21% complained about submitting an FPCA twice, and 20% mentioned lack of information on candidates or issues.



### Embassy/Consulate Voting Officers

The embassy/consulate voting officers are the main source of voting assistance for U.S. citizens overseas not affiliated with the federal government. This survey was conducted to determine the overall voting assistance provided and the difficulties encountered in assisting these U.S. citizens abroad.

Over 55% of the embassy/consulate voting officers had been voting officers for more than 10 months. However, of those surveyed, 48% indicated that 2% or less work time was spent on voting officer duties.

Training of voting officers was mainly by receipt of instructions from the Department of State transmitted by aerogram and cables which were based on information provided by FVAP. Approximately 85% of voting officers indicated they received sufficient voting information and instructions, except for FPCA's, in order to carry out their responsibilities. Approximately 100% said they had sufficient quantities of the Voting Assistance Guide. However, 90.5% said they did not have sufficient quantities of FPCA's.

The information/assistance most often requested of the embassy/consulate voting officer was notarial service with the next most often requested service the addresses of local election officials.

The most significant problem as reported by the embassy/consulate voting officer was that the voters did not receive the ballot in sufficient time in order to vote and return it to be counted.

### LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIALS

The local election officials are an important part of the absentee voting process, and as in 1980, these officials were surveyed to obtain their views on how the absentee process is working and to identify problems and recommendations for further improvements.

The median number of registered voters in a jurisdiction was 87,500, and the median voting rate about 77% . Among the sampled jurisdictions, absentee votes comprised, on the average, about 6.5% of all votes cast -- a substantial share. About 12.7% of the absentee votes, in turn, were cast by military personnel or overseas U.S. civilians (federally employed or private). The rate of absentee voting has increased by about 1.5% since the 1980 election.

Lack of adequate ballot transit time is a major cause of disenfranchising absentee voters. As stated in the "Progress of States" portion of this Report, a minimum transit time of 45 days is needed in order for an absentee voter to request the ballot, execute it and return it in time to be counted. Approximately one-third of the military and two-fifths of the civilian applicants submitted their request for ballots during September, with the third week in September being the most often selected week to submit the request. During the month of August, 18% of the military and 16.4% of the civilian employees mailed in their ballot requests. The military and civilian applicants were fairly close in terms of the median date of ballot submissions--September 6 (military) and September 11 (Civilian) - the date when approximately half of the absentee voters had already submitted their ballot request. This represents an improvement over 1980 for the military applicants, although not for civilians.

**CHART 11**  
**TIME ELAPSED (Days) BETWEEN BALLOT APPLICATION**  
**SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT**

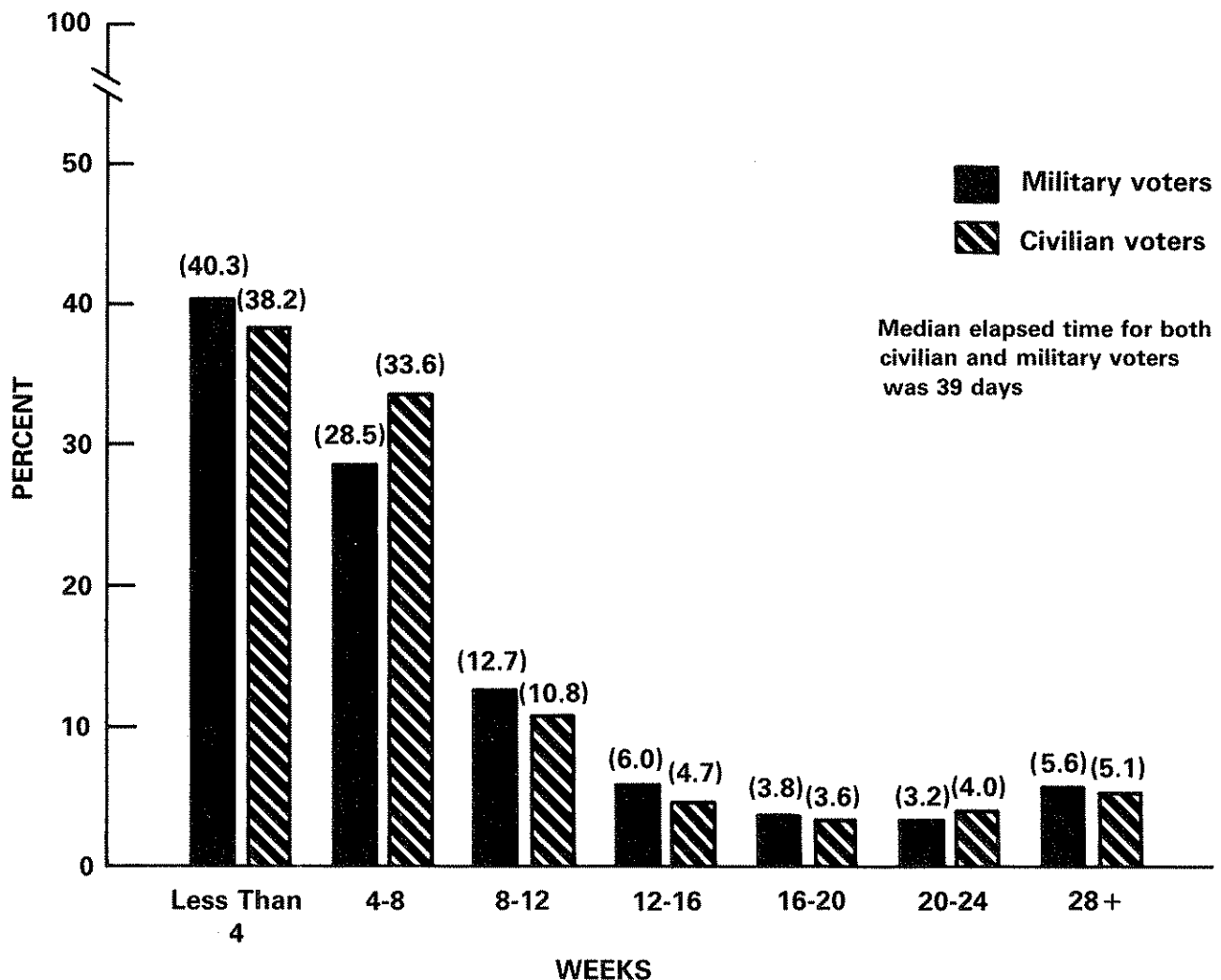


Chart (11) indicates the time required between ballot submission and ballot receipt. On average, it took nearly six weeks after submission to receive the ballot--39 days for both military and civilian voters.

Compared to 1980, it took longer for military voters to obtain a ballot for the 1984 election. The average elapsed time between ballot submission and ballot request was 32 days in 1980, compared to 39 days in 1984. For civilian applicants the average elapsed time was virtually the same in both election years - 40 days in 1980, 39 in 1984. The difference is largely due to applications being sent earlier in 1984 than in 1980.

The majority of military personnel and federally employed civilians overseas mailed back their ballots during the second half of October. For both groups, the median date for returning the ballot was October 23. A few absentee voters mailed in their ballots before September, but 20.1% of the military voters and 16.9% of the civilian voters returned the ballots in November.

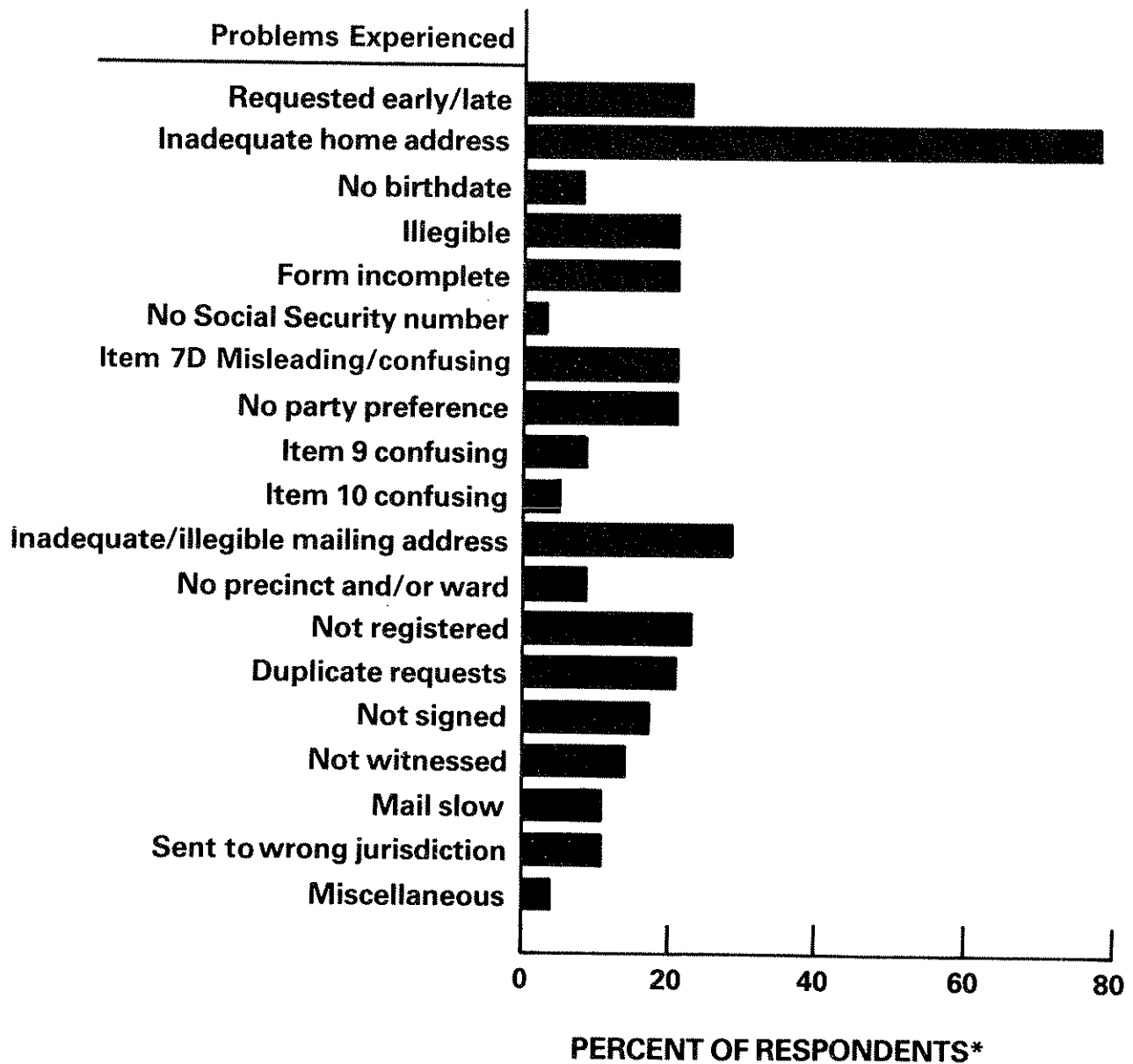
As noted in Chart 12, the absentee voting process was not substantially impaired by the delivery of ballots to the wrong address or by the late return of ballots. On the average, less than one percent of the ballots could not be delivered, and between one and two percent were returned too late to counted.

A more serious problem was the failure to ensure timely delivery of absentee ballots to all who requested them. In 1984, almost one-fifth of all ballots were mailed to applicants in the last two weeks of October--too late for some to be completed. This represents some improvement over 1980 when about one-quarter of all ballots were mailed after mid-October.

On average, at least 17% of all applications for an absentee ballot were made with a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). Most election officials tended to attribute problems involving the FPCA to incomplete or incorrect information provided by applicants; the most common problem was the lack of a home address.

## CHART 12

### PROBLEMS EXPERIENCE IN PROCESSING FPCAs



\*Because multiple responses were allowed, the percentages sum to more than 100%.